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SUBJECT: ELIMINATING FGM- NGO ACTIVITIES IN THE FOREST
REGION

11. (U) SUMMARY. During a recent visit to the Forest Region, Assistant Poloff explored the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which affects an estimated 96% of the female population in Guinea. Meetings with local authorities, citizens, and NGOs working to combat the practice of FGM revealed a general consensus about the importance of providing practitioners of FGM with an alternate means of making a living. While all of the organizations emphasized the continued challenges to eliminating the dangerous practice, many commented that the social taboo surrounding the topic is in decline. END SUMMARY.

CPTAFE REPRESENTATIVES CONFRONT CHALLENGES

12. (U) The Coordinating Body on Traditional Practices Affecting Women and Children (CPTAFE) has addressed traditional practices that harm the health of women and children since 1988. CPTAFE's efforts include publications, radio programs, educational seminars, and organizing community events. Currently, CPTAFE collaborates with Guinea's Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Affairs. CPTAFE credits itself with successfully lobbying for the inclusion of an article in the Guinean constitution that upholds the right to physical integrity of the person and condemns all forms of inhumane treatment. (COMMENT. While this constitutional article could be interpreted to include FGM, no cases have yet been brought to trial. FGM is also illegal under Article 265 of the Guinean Penal Code, although the law is not enforced. END COMMENT.) In the Forest region, CPTAFE operates in the regional cities of Kissidougou, Guekedou, and N'Zerekore. The organization hopes to establish a center in Lola, near the Liberian and Ivoirian borders, within the year.

13. (U) The CPTAFE representative in Kissidougou explained that activities are mostly focused on educational sessions for the community and finding alternate means of making a living for the women who perform FGM. When asked about the difficulties facing the organization, the representative identified a lack of motivation within the general population to eliminate the practice. She also noted that involving men and establishing long-term solutions pose the greatest challenges. However, she did comment that there has been "progress" in the sense that the subject of FGM is becoming less taboo.

14. (U) The CPTAFE office in N'Zerekore identified a number of problems facing the organization. According to the representative, the center has very little operational support and has relocated several times due to expensive rent costs. The representative was frustrated by nurses at the local hospitals, who she claimed perform excision, but make excuses to avoid CPTAFE's educational sessions. She noted that young women in the region are increasingly educated on

the risks of FGM, commenting that "the female students understand and are now telling their families they do not want to be excised." She also pointed to providing practitioners of FGM with an alternate means of living as the most potentially successful approach to eliminating FGM.

TOSTAN DIRECTOR WARNS AGAINST SHOCKING LANGUAGE

15. (U) TOSTAN is an American NGO based in Senegal that implements programs focused on democracy, health, and human rights in order to address the problem of FGM. In Guinea, TOSTAN's projects in the Upper, Middle, and Lower Regions are funded by USAID. In the Forest Region, TOSTAN partners with UNICEF. Asst Poloff met with the Country Director prior to the Forest visit, who explained that TOSTAN utilizes a holistic approach to eliminating FGM and that only two training modules speak directly about the practice. The Director noted that the terminology associated with the practice is important, cautioning Asst Poloff to use the term "excision" rather than FGM. TOSTAN's ultimate goal is a public declaration against excision by a number of villages, so the organization "tries not to shock people because elders have important decision making role in the villages." The Director maintained that by explaining the right to life and to health, people will begin to realize the dangers of excision on their own.

16. (U) Asst Poloff met with TOSTAN representatives in Guekedou. They explained that their activities, often educational sketches and community meetings, focus on

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democracy, health, and human rights and do not directly address FGM. The representative named improving literacy rates and encouraging pregnant women not to give birth in the bush as the two largest priorities in the region.

LOCAL NGOS LOOK FOR LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

17. (U) In addition to the organizations operating nationally, Asst Poloff met with a number of local organizations that address FGM. In Guekedou, the Association of Women for the Future of Women (AFAF) works to protect non-excised girls from three area villages that have abandoned excision. AFAF also works to inform the surrounding villages that have not yet abandoned the practice about its dangers. In cooperation with Plan Guinea, they employ "educators" who establish dialogue about the practice of excision with key members of local communities. The educators aim to inform parents as well as young girls about the health risks of the practice. The representative explained that the organization utilizes local midwives as intermediaries with the surrounding villagers. While the representative acknowledged lingering taboos, she noted that the topic of excision is now being addressed on the local radio. She identified the practitioners of FGM, and the general ignorance of the population on health issues, as the greatest obstacles to ending the practice.

18. (U) In the village of Bossou, near the Ivorian border, Asst Poloff met with representatives from the Union of Volunteers for the Integrated Development of Zantompiezo (UVODIZ). The Embassy's Self-Help Program has funded the creation of several vegetable farms, which provide an alternate means of making a living to former practitioners of FGM. Nine neighboring villages have established vegetable farms as a way of helping the women who previously performed excision establish new livelihoods as well as maintain their status. The representative from UVODIZ noted that Bossou is the only locality in the region to have abandoned the practice for five years running, and attributed the program's success to USG financing. However, he felt that a long-term

solution must address more than the women excisers. He argued that the Government of Guinea is not taking legal action against the practice and that the USG should work to pressure Guinean officials more explicitly.

COMMENT

19. (U) While most of the representatives recognized some progress in reducing cultural taboos surrounding FGM, few described more concrete results. In fact, recent statistics show little to no decline in the number of women who are subjected to FGM in Guinea. The organizations generally expressed support for a holistic, community-based approach to eliminating the practice, but many were concerned about villages that had abandoned excision reverting to the practice if effective long-term solutions were not identified. Last summer, post held an in-reach for local staff that took a very direct approach to addressing FGM, featuring photographs and a graphic discussion of the types of FGM and its health consequences, which was highly successful and well-received. Contrary to some of the NGOs' softer approach, the success of the Embassy-sponsored, more direct discussion suggests that more specific information may be welcomed by select audiences. Various Embassy discussions with Guineans on FGM indicate that many people really do not understand what FGM is, let alone its social and health implications.

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